

Pedestrian Master Plan Advisory Group (PMPAG) Meeting #17

Seattle Municipal Tower, 700 Fifth Avenue

Room 4050/4060

November 21, 2008 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Summary

Attendance

Suzanne Anderson, James Bush, Rebecca Deehr, Celeste Gilman, Tony Gomez, Kirste Johnson, Rob Kaufman, Mark Landreneau, Kate Martin, Paulo Nunes-Ueno, Chas Redmond, Jim Schultz, Richard Staudt, Betty Lou Valentine

Staff and Guests: Tracy Burrows, Margaret Casey, Shane DeWald, Dan Goodman (Toole Design Group), Barbara Gray, Megan Hoyt, Tracy Krawczyk, Amalia Leighton (SvR Design), Allison Phillips (SvR Design), Traci Ratzliff, Amy Shumann, Peg Staeheli (SvR Design), Jennifer Wieland

The meeting was facilitated by Co-Chairs Rebecca Deehr and Paulo Nunes-Ueno.

PMPAG Issues, Opportunities, and Concerns

Rebecca and Paulo provided an update on the November 17, 2008 Steering Committee meeting, which focused on a discussion of the range of tools that can be used to stop drivers from speeding. The Steering Committee was joined by Charlie Bookman (SDOT Traffic Management Division Director), Luke Korpi (SDOT Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program), and Lt. Pierre Davis (Seattle Policy Department). SDOT currently is reconfiguring the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program to focus on behavior change and more comprehensive public outreach strategies.

The Steering Committee developed a number of recommendations: treat more public places (e.g., parks, libraries, community centers) like school zones in terms of speed limits and enforcement; establish a fine structure that includes community service (e.g., working as a school crossing guard) for speeding violations; increase fines for speeding; and fund and deploy additional traffic enforcement officers throughout Seattle. Paulo noted that he hopes the PMPAG will make a clear statement as a group that Seattle will be a city with no speeding. Barbara Gray commented that additional information about the meeting is provided in the Staff Report.

Chas Redmond reported on a recent telephone conversation he had with Megan Hoyt (SDOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Program) about the pedestrian safety diagram and question and answer session in the *Seattle Times* (see the Staff Report for additional information about the piece). Megan called Chas to discuss his post on the listserv regarding the inequality that exists when pedestrians must push a button to request “permission” to cross the street. Chas was advocating for the fact that pedestrians should always be able to travel with a green light, regardless of the pedestrian signal.

Chas and Megan talked about three specific items. First, there is the issue of the use of push button signals, which are still in place throughout Seattle. Megan recommended that people call 684-ROAD to request that a push button signal be assessed, and potentially removed. Second, Chas mentioned that some crossings allow less than half the time for pedestrians to cross as is allowed for vehicle movement. Megan noted that this is another issue that should be reported to 684-ROAD.

And third, there are some places in Seattle where a push button signal is required, such as Washington State Department of Transportation roads associated with I-5.

Chas was pleased with the conversation, and added that there are specific actions that the PMPAG can take to address the use and removal of push button signals. There is no Seattle Municipal Code that requires the use of push buttons; it is a policy that may be changed. He suggested a recommendation stating that pedestrians have the same equality at intersections as vehicles. Chas also requested a list of the signals in the city that require pedestrian activation.

Jim Schultz noted that he thought the *Seattle Times* piece was a great start, suggesting that it might be the first time in nearly five years that the paper has focused attention on pedestrian safety. He recommended broadening the distribution of the piece, possibly by having SDOT obtain reprints of the diagram and provide them to traffic officers for distribution to both motorists and pedestrians. Barbara added that SPD has been very open to having SDOT staff attend roll call and speak to the officers and that might provide a good venue for sharing the information more broadly.

Becca raised further discussion about Steering Committee meetings, specifically how to address the fact that not all PMPAG members are able to attend the meetings as currently scheduled. She suggested that the co-chairs will continue to provide updates about the Steering Committee meetings at the full PMPAG meetings and asked members to let the co-chairs know if there are issues that would benefit from discussion with city staff. The co-chairs will work with Barbara and Jennifer Wieland to arrange small group meetings with interested PMPAG members. Rob Kaufman noted his feeling that speakers should attend PMPAG meetings as opposed to Steering Committee meetings. He expressed uncertainty about the role of the Steering Committee and concern about the amount of work that is taking place outside of PMPAG meetings.

Becca also reported that Feet First will launch the Northeast Seattle Trails (NEST) Project in early January, which will plan for a pedestrian network and wayfinding supports in the northeast. Anyone interested in participating should speak with Chas. Becca noted that her last day at Feet First will be December 19, although she will continue her involvement with the PMPAG.

Jim provided a summary of an October 27, 2008 meeting with SDOT and SPD staff to discuss parking regulations and enforcement, and he requested that minutes of the meeting be sent to PMPAG. The discussion focused on the authority granted to SDOT to allow parking closer than 20 feet to a crosswalk, and Jim noted that he is still hoping to receive citations for the portions of the code that grant this authority. He added that there was agreement about the fact that parking too close to a crosswalk can limit the visibility of motorists and pedestrians and may create a hazard. The next question is what might be done to fix this situation. Barbara noted that she felt the meeting was a positive step, and suggested that SPD has plans to improve parking enforcement practices with a number of new staff joining the parking division.

Staff Report

Barbara distributed a hard copy of the SDOT staff report that covered updates on several topics: infrastructure improvements (funded primarily through Bridging the Gap and the Neighborhood Street Fund), City Council news, events and programs, and other items of note. Particular highlights included the launch of Google's "Street View" in the Puget Sound area and deployment of SDOT's accessible pedestrian signal location website. Barbara requested that Mark Landreneau ask some people from Lighthouse for the Blind to review the website and provide SDOT with any comments

or concerns. Mark noted that the website will be a good tool and should assist the mobility experts at the Lighthouse in their work. He added that the biggest issue with accessible signals is inconsistent placement at an intersection, leading to confusion for users.

Barbara also noted that Jennifer recently presented at a workshop in Miami, FL and learned about signals that provide pedestrians with additional crossing time on request. Rob asked if there are other technologies, such as a special card, that could be used to request additional crossing time, and Barbara responded that staff will look into this.

Barbara distributed a draft flyer about the SDOT Sidewalk Repair Program that seeks to educate property owners about their responsibility to maintain the right-of-way adjacent to their property. PMPAG members are invited to send all comments on the flyer to Jennifer (jennifer.wieland@seattle.gov).

The full staff report will be posted on the PMPAG website at:
www.seattle.gov/transportation/pm_agendas.htm.

Presentation of Walkable System Mapping

Amalia Leighton (SvR Design) and Dan Goodman (Toole Design Group) presented preliminary results of the walkable system mapping that was introduced at the October 24, 2008 PMPAG meeting. Amalia reminded the group of the elements of a walkable system and noted the addition of several new pedestrian generators, based on comments from the PMPAG. These included major parks, multi-family housing, and stairs and bridges.

The pedestrian demand methodology identifies areas that have the potential for high levels of pedestrian activity by identifying radii and weights for the various generators and layering this information with population and employment projections. The purpose is not to estimate the number of pedestrians that will walk in a particular location; rather, the demand is relative and allows for comparison of different areas to one another.

Dan introduced the methodology for evaluating improvement opportunities along and across the roadway. Potential improvement opportunities are identified through analysis of existing infrastructure and by combining characteristics that impact the pedestrian experience while crossing at an intersection or while walking along a roadway.

Dan stressed the flexibility of the analysis and methodology and presented a number of ways that the information and results can be combined to develop a project list and an implementation strategy for the plan. Options include overlapping the improvement opportunities for along and across the roadway; adding high demand areas to these overlaps; and looking at high demand and high opportunity overlaps within a buffer.

Barbara introduced various ways that the data may be used to identify and prioritize programmatic actions (e.g., enforcement and education strategies), policy and regulatory changes (e.g., comprehensive plan amendments), and capital improvements (e.g., sidewalk program).

The full presentation will be posted as an attachment to the minutes at:
www.seattle.gov/transportation/pm_agendas.htm.

System Mapping Discussion

Paulo opened the discussion on the presentation by asking each PMPAG member to comment, in turn, on the presentation and raise any questions or concerns that should be addressed.

Suzanne Anderson noted that the demand map identified areas in the northeast quadrant of Seattle as places with potentially high demand, but this is one of the parts of the city without sidewalks. Amalia responded that overlaying the demand and the improvement opportunities analysis will highlight exactly these types of situations, helping to prioritize areas of the city with high pedestrian demand and insufficient infrastructure.

Kirste Johnson asked for clarification on a statement in the “Elements of a Walkable System” document that suggests that a street can be walkable without a sidewalk. Barbara responded that the project team is considering how to address walkability needs relatively quickly in parts of the city without sidewalks. This calls for thinking about creative solutions, including the idea that walkability is about providing appropriate space for people to use, whether or not that space has a concrete sidewalk with curb and gutter. There are other options for making a place walkable, such as using different types of materials for walkways and establishing a “clear zone” for pedestrians.

Kirste and Rob asked where collisions are included in the analysis, and Amalia responded that they are part of the crossing the roadway score. Rob also asked about speed limits, and Amalia noted that posted speed limit is included in both the walking along and crossing the roadway scores.

Rob wondered if it would be possible to use the model to show that reducing speeds would reduce the concentration of collisions (and the severity of collisions) in the city. Dan replied that this might be possible, although the scores are a combination of a number of factors. These other factors, such as the presence of curb ramps, might override the weight that is currently assigned to speed limits. Rob recommended running the analysis with less weighting on curb ramps in order to look at the overlap between speed, collisions, and potential demand.

Rob also asked if the crossing the roadway scores accounted for mid-block crossings in any way, as pedestrians may sometimes prefer to cross mid-block, despite the fact that injury severity is higher in mid-block collisions. Dan noted that the scoring system does look at areas with a long distance between signals, which may indicate that pedestrians are crossing mid-block in some cases. Amalia added that it might be possible to overlay a filter of mid-block crossings in the final analysis.

Rob noted that it will not be possible to build sidewalks everywhere and recommended that an alternative might be to dedicate certain streets to pedestrians (i.e., a pedestrian boulevard that would be similar to existing bicycle boulevards) and take appropriate measures to make drivers aware that pedestrians have priority on those streets.

Richard Staudt commented on the need to look at the linear paths between destinations (e.g., between a school and a park), as those paths will be the areas with heavy pedestrian traffic. Peg Staeheli responded that, while a particular linear path might come to the forefront, the multiple connections and linkages between destinations are also important. Connectivity of the system is the overarching goal.

Richard also noted the importance of defining a walkable space for pedestrians, free of obstructions such as garbage and recycling bins. He asked if such a definition might include revision of design

standards or a policy dictating the location and placement of bins. Barbara responded that current conversations have focused on “good neighbor agreements” and education for homeowners about the impact of obstructions. There may be opportunities to create both residential and retail programs.

James Bush noted that he feels there are major gaps in the arterial sidewalk system that are now highlighted, and the analysis provides the information that is needed for a priority system. He wondered if a list of the “top 10” gaps will be produced, and Dan responded that producing a prioritized project list is the next step.

Tony Gomez recommended that, to best address social justice and equity issues, the system plan framework should identify detractors to pedestrian activity as well as generators of such activity. He was happy to see that health data will be included in the analysis, and he wondered if street crime data might be added. Tony also suggested that trip and fall data might be a worthwhile addition, as these types of incidents are a system-wide issue.

Tony noted that the potential balancing factors include opportunities to leverage funds, and he suggested coordination with the municipalities that border Seattle as well. Also, Tony commented on the large number of processes that are happening in different parts of Seattle, such as the opening of the light rail and new development along Rainier Avenue. Barbara noted that the project team has been searching for a way to capture future land use and zoning, as it is important to identify development that will be occurring. However, adding this to the analysis has been challenging.

Mark commented that the maps of improvement opportunities might be useful in orientation and mobility training for blind pedestrians. He noted that the maps highlight dichotomies between areas of the city, with significant infrastructure needs in some less densely populated parts of Seattle. Mark also echoed Rob’s concerns about mid-block crossings, adding that the pedestrian crossing flags seem to be working well.

Kate Martin suggested that the Pedestrian Master Plan should consider what a healthy human habitat looks like in an urban environment and avoid a focus on the car-centric status quo. Kate recommended a roadway configuration that provides 40-50% of the roadway for pedestrians, buffers, cyclists, and transit, adding that current ratios are not working for all users. Amalia noted that the opportunities analysis does account for road width, sidewalk width, and the presence of buffers, as these all play an important role in the pedestrian experience.

Kate also noted the importance of neighborhood business districts as a pedestrian generator and suggested that they be given a special weight in the potential pedestrian demand analysis. She also recommended that additional points be given to high schools (as has been done with universities), as many high school students travel in patterns similar to college students.

Chas expressed his concern about the “east-west dissonance” in creating a walkable system, noting that (moving east-west) it is difficult to access a number of destinations, including parks. He reiterated Tony’s recommendation that the analysis should capture anticipated development and future zoning. Chas also wondered how the analysis accounts for the fact that block lengths differ throughout the city, which can impact the likelihood that a pedestrian will cross mid-block. Amalia noted that the analysis currently includes distance between signals, and sidewalk segment length can be added.

Chas commented that the city has a large number of roadway configurations, which present different opportunities for using the right-of-way to create a positive pedestrian environment. He expressed interest in seeing recommendations for new designs and improvements to existing designs for various amounts of "extra" right-of-way. Amalia mentioned that Seattle's Complete Streets ordinance does this type of work and added that the project list for the Pedestrian Master Plan will include specific recommendations for the areas identified as improvement opportunities.

Celeste Gilman commented that the analysis is useful for showing top project priorities and clarified several points with regard to major generators. Celeste also expressed the importance of small neighborhood commercial areas as generators as well as the importance of curb ramps in looking at accessibility for pedestrian crossings. She added that she is looking forward to seeing recommendations for programmatic and policy changes, as these are the types of plan actions that will have an impact on the entire city.

Jim noted that the city has tools in place to improve pedestrian safety, many of which are not fully utilized, such as the cleaning and maintenance of public walkways and stairways. He added that the plan may generate a large number of public works projects that could create jobs for Seattleites.

PMPAG Reminders

Becca and Paulo adjourned the meeting, and reminded the group that the PMPAG Steering Committee meetings for December have not yet been scheduled. Look for an email from Jennifer with dates and times.

Barbara noted that the January PMPAG meeting will include a great deal of information for review and comment, including draft plan recommendations. In order to make the meeting as useful as possible, staff will work with the PMPAG Steering Committee to consider alternate formats for that meeting. Comments or suggestions about the meeting format should be emailed to Jennifer.

Next Meeting

The PMPAG voted (in June) not to meet in December due to the holidays; regularly scheduled meetings resume in January 2009.

Date and Time: January 23, 2009; 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 4050/60